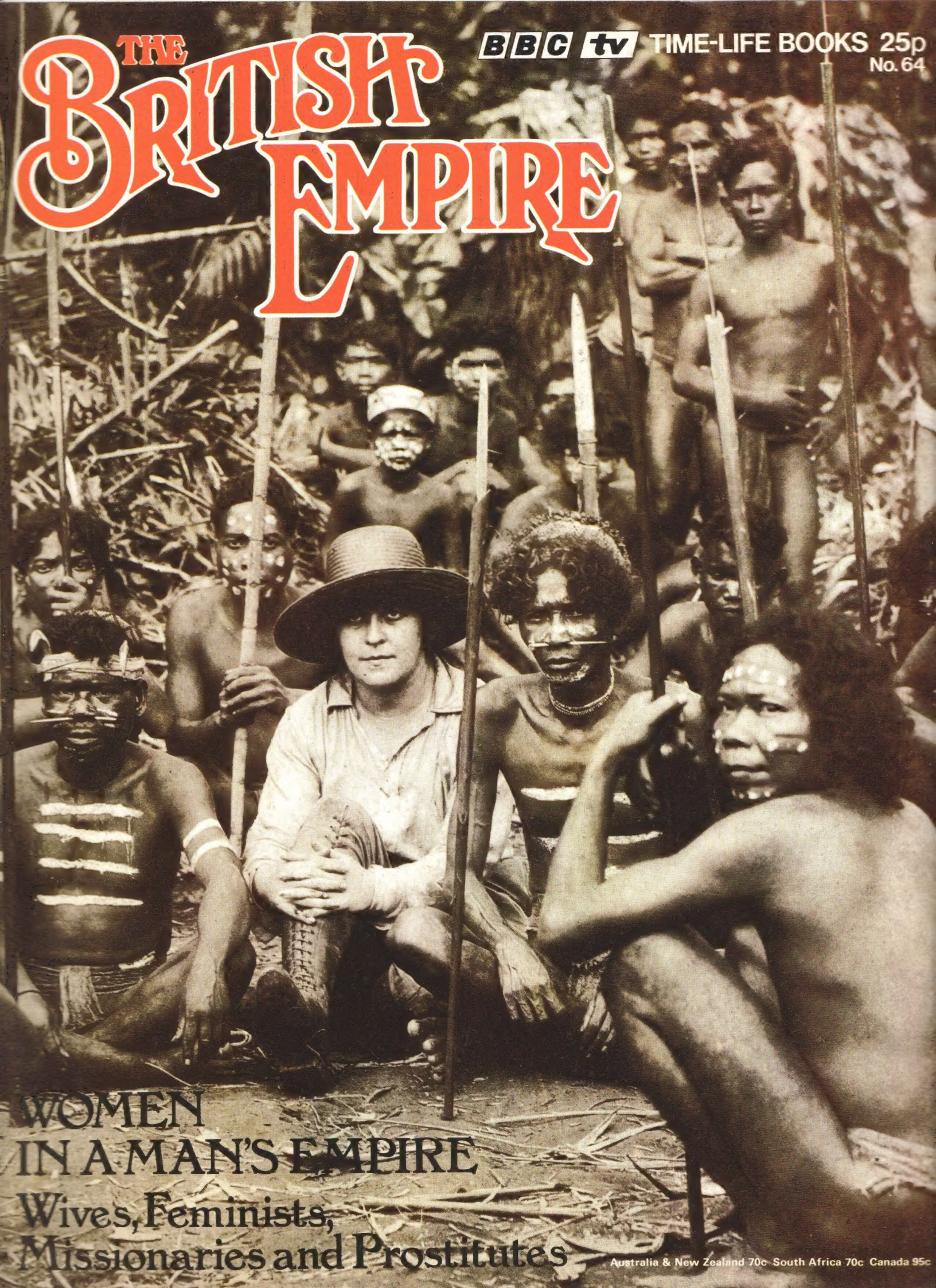
THE BRITISH EMPIRE
BBC tv TIME-LIFE BOOKS 25p
No. 64
WOMEN IN A MAN'S EMPIRE
Wives, Feminists, Missionaries and Prostitutes
Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

THE BRITISH EMPIRE

BBC tv TIME-LIFE BOOKS 25p
No. 64

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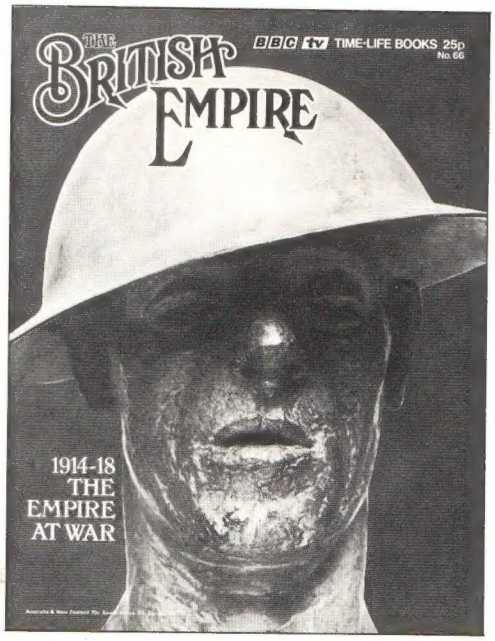


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**Cover:** In her "explorer's uniform," a certain Mrs. Hutt does not bat an eyelid as she poses for a photograph among a fearsome group of warriors from Borneo.

# WOMEN IN A MAN'S EMPIRE

**Men may have conquered an Empire, but it was women who set its tone and style. Driven by economic necessity, by family ties, by a sense of duty or even sheer adventurousness, women did more than stamp settler colonies with the hallmarks of Victorian respectability: they found unprecedented opportunities to heal, convert, explore – and even to indulge in the occasional eccentric impulse**

The wife of an English administrator in India rides in a "tonquin."

**By Valerie Bethell**

Empire building has been traditionally regarded as a male enterprise. Kipling in his poem *The Feet of the Young Men* wrote:

*He must go – go – go away from here!*
*On the other side of the world he's overdue.*

The same sentiments were expressed, more robustly, in the Victorian music-hall at the time of the Boer War when audiences sang:

*Have you heard how centuries ago, boys*
*Young John Bull all at once began to grow, boys*
*Learnt to walk and packing up his things*
*Broke away from mammy's apron strings*
*Joined in the scramble, sailing far and wide*
*Building an Empire 'way beyond the tide.*

John Bull stood for more than just Britain: he represented those sturdy British males – privateers, traders, explorers, administrators and soldiers – who for three centuries had built and extended the Empire and whose names filled the pages of the history books.

But this idea of a male monopoly was an illusion. The British Empire was fashioned by women as well as by men; their contribution to its character was both significant and enduring.

British colonization overseas began when the *Mayflower* sailed from Plymouth to New England in 1620. From the earliest days of the American frontier, women were to be found working alongside the male colonist, sharing the struggles, the disappointments and the triumphs of the Pilgrim Fathers. Their steady faith and courage played no small part in the evolution of the North American colonies from a harsh wilderness into a peaceful society.

However, relatively few women were to be found in other parts of the British Empire in the 17th and 18th Centuries. In the West Indies, for instance, absentee landlords ran the sugar plantations and family settlement was unusual. In India, where East India Company officials were laying the foundations of the British Raj, there was little place for wives either. Life was dangerous and it was thought impossible to expose Englishwomen to the horrors of the Indian hot season.

In the 19th Century the picture changed. Most important, there was a new wave of family emigration to Canada, to Australia and New Zealand, and to South Africa. Men were looking outwards to the temptingly empty lands across the sea where hopes for the future seemed so much brighter than they did in Britain, then troubled by serious unemployment. Once the decision to emigrate had been made, their womenfolk went with them into a dauntingly unknown future.

At the same time, women began to accompany, or join, their menfolk in the tropical Empire where Britain was still an occupying, rather than a colonizing, power. The largest number went to India. By the early 19th Century, the pioneering days were over and peace was being established under white rule. With the opening of hill stations, women could escape from the worst of the climate. Later in the 19th Century, an increasing number of white women found their way to West Africa, to the Middle East and to South-East Asia, as well. But, in comparison with India, they were few and the notorious unhealthiness of West Africa was suffi-

**In this 1820s cartoon by George Cruickshank, first-class refinement aboard an India-bound passenger vessel is upset by rolling seas.**

**Women travelling steerage on voyage to Australia mope dejectedly in squalor – a stark contrast to the luxury of the journey to India.**

cient to deter all but the most dedicated.

The most important role of the woman in the 19th-Century British Empire was that of wife and mother, especially in the settler colonies. As in North America in the 17th and 18th Centuries, it was the women who in Canada, in Australia, in New Zealand and in South Africa softened the rough edges of life and helped civilize pioneering society. As the battle for survival was won and the settlers began to establish a home, rather than simply a shelter against the elements, then the role of the wife became increasingly important. She both civilized her physical surroundings and set the style of the new colonial society, imposing the conventions and niceties of European civilization on frontier life. This achievement, carried out when life was still a constant battle against unfamiliar climates, hostile natives, physical hardships, loneliness, poverty and isolation, was of very real and lasting significance.

In the tropics, too, women made their mark chiefly in a traditional subordinate role – as the wives, daughters and sisters of the company officials, military men and civil servants who had previously been living a bachelor's existence in India and elsewhere. The changes they wrought were on the lives of their menfolk: putting them under pressure to drink less, to give up native concubines and generally remember they were respectable Victorian husbands and fathers. Englishwomen had less effect on Indian society at large for, in contrast with the women who went out to the settler colonies, they did not see themselves as a permanent part of this strange country. Indeed, they went to considerable lengths to isolate themselves socially, and so far as they could, physically, from the unfamiliar and often hostile world in which they were obliged to live, devotedly creating little microcosms of the mother country where everything British was lovingly gathered and jealously guarded until the happy day arrived when they could return home.

Quite separate from the wives and daughters and sisters of the male Empire-builders, however, there was another, smaller, group of women who went out to the tropical Empire where they played a very different role. They went as individuals in their own right, the majority of them as missionaries (especially in West Africa) and as nurses. For an enterprising girl with an urge to help humanity, work in Britain's tropical colonies offered perhaps the best escape route from the limitations of Victorian Britain. Expanding missionary activity throughout the century provided them with almost limitless openings as nurses in mission hospitals, or as teachers in mission schools. Later, as government hospitals and schools were opened, the range of opportunities grew still further. Most of the women who went out to these jobs have left no record, but their contribution to the history of the Empire was also a vital one.

And, finally, there was the handful of women who emerged as embodiments of Bernard Shaw's "new women." Some were exotic and perhaps a little eccentric, but they proved that a determined, well-educated woman, who had contacts with the governing élite, could, by what she wrote and said, influence imperial attitudes and even alter the course of imperial history.

One of the chief destinations for British

**As his daughter reads news from relatives in Australia, a cobbler holds a £100-note sent home from his relatives in the goldfields.**

emigrants in the early 19th Century was Canada. The harsh reality of life in an empty country was a severe shock to most settlers after their comfortable dreams of new wealth and happiness. "A sickly, peevish, discontented person will make a poor settler's wife," warned Catherine Parr Traill in her famous *Settler's Guide*, that invaluable handbook written for women emigrating to Canada.

Her words were addressed specifically to the wives and daughters of the small labourers and mechanics who, throughout the 19th Century, left Britain for what they, like others, believed must be a better life across the Atlantic. From bitter experience, Mrs. Traill made it quite clear that, whatever a woman's background, when she arrived in Canada she would be a pioneer first and a lady second.

Insofar as she was able to adjust at all, Catherine Parr Traill was something of a rarity. Many of the middle-class women who emigrated to Canada never did. Indeed, many never recovered from the horrors of the voyage out; even on the best ships for instance, cholera was a persistent nightmare and there was no shortage of advice on how to avoid it. One emigrant who had undergone the horrors of travelling steerage wrote: "Wear flannel next to the skin, ensure that both your clothes and person are clean before and during the voyage, eat solid wholesome food and avoid crowded ships without Doctors."

Ashore, the difficulties continued. After the long journey to the backwoods, even a woman used to the rigours of farm life in Britain must have been daunted by the sight of that first plot of land. It was said to take 20 years to get a "wild farm" under cultivation. They could be 20 hard years for the woman who, in addition to all her regular domestic chores, found it necessary to add a wide range of skills she had never needed before. It was useful, for example, to know how to cultivate yeast: one family lived for months on unleavened bread when the store-bought supply ran out.

Every worthy wife also had to know how to cure meat, how to make soap from wood ashes and grease, how to fabricate proper candles instead of the meat-fat and twisted-rag variety the poorer immigrants favoured, and how to weave and dye cloth.

But first the family had to build the cabin, and the woman had to transform it from a crude, functional shelter into a home. Furniture was needed and, although much of it was home-made, 12 painted Canadian chairs could be bought for 50 shillings. Where money was really short, however, she improvised. A bedstead of coarse cedar poles and a linen bag filled with hay or dried moss may not have been too comfortable, but it was better than sleeping on the floor. Most important, though, was a good cooking-stove, and an outlay of 20 to 30 Canadian

dollars (the new currency introduced in 1851 exchanging for between four and five to the pound) would buy "The Lion" or "The Farmer's Friend," large enough to cook for a family of up to a dozen.

The life of settlers in Canada was harder than anything they had experienced in Britain and, even with a good iron stove, a log cabin was little protection against the bitter February cold. Poverty remained an ever-present threat. A single fire or flood could wipe out years of effort in a matter of hours. It was then that disease was most likely to strike the undernourished and ill-clad family. Although Canada enjoyed a reputation as a healthy country in contrast with the other parts of the Empire, cholera, rheumatism, malaria and dysentery were nevertheless endemic.

For the middle-class ladies the social life was meagre in comparison with home. In the towns, there were parties, balls and sleigh-rides in the winter season; but ladies were strongly advised against taking satin shoes with them to Canada since "merino frocks" and "prunella shoes" were considered quite smart enough for evening wear.

But at least, by dint of hard work, it was possible for a lady to maintain standards, which made Canada a very much more attractive place in the eyes of respectable ladies than outlandish places like Australia. For over Australia there hung the heavy cloud of its convict origins. Until the 1830s, when immigration of free settlers accelerated and the new colonies of Victoria and South Australia were established with free populations, the great majority of women as well as men in eastern Australia had come out as convicts. There were, of course, others: army officers brought wives and families, many of whom eventually settled there permanently, and a few free women came out as servants. But the majority were convicted criminals and many of them earned deservedly appalling reputations.

Hardened by poverty, brutalized by imprisonment and transportation, they readily took to prostitution and were popularly believed to be "available to every man from their jailors in England to the officers and marines on board the transports."

Paramatta, the depot where women convicts were sent for confinement, for employment and for punishment provided splendid ammunition for those who sought to vilify them. Thanks to the promiscuity of its inhabitants, it quickly earned the reputation of being "more like a lying-in hospital than a factory." The punishments meted out to convict women did little to help the process of rehabilitation: "Flogging on the naked breech" (on bare buttocks) was abandoned only with reluctance, and head-shaving and gagging – for the use of abusive language in church – were common. To be fair to this first generation of Australian women, it is difficult to see how things could have been otherwise.

**The breeches worn by the bride in this 1894 photograph of a New Zealand wedding testify to the severe practicality forced upon settlers in the harsh new life of the colonies.**

# Catherine Parr Traill: Gentlewoman in Canada

An outbreak of cholera in Montreal in 1832 nearly deprived posterity of a mass of detailed information about everyday life in Canada's pioneering days. It almost killed Catherine Parr Traill, the immigrant wife of a half-pay officer. A woman of extraordinary mental and physical resilience, she managed to withstand both the disease and the draconian treatment of the day, and press on to Canada's wild backwoods where, for another 67 years, she grimly hung on in the face of far greater trials – and found time, too, to record them.

Her earlier life had not prepared her in any way for the adventure. Born in London in 1802, Catherine was the youngest of the eight children of Thomas Strickland, a gentleman who had made a comfortable fortune from business. She was six years old when the family moved to Reydon Hall in Suffolk where her conventional 19th-Century upbringing was enriched by a measure of education she received from her father. Her talent for "scribbling" – a popular activity for young ladies who had few other outlets for their energies and imaginations – brought in her first author's fee when she was only 16, and it was to stand her in good stead after the death of her father; she and her sisters found a ready outlet for their writings, and so were able to make ends meet. Thanks to their father's influence, the Strickland girls were of an unusually independent cast of mind. In 1830 Susanna and her husband decided to leave Britain for Canada, and when Catherine married Lieutenant Thomas Traill shortly after, they followed suit, both supremely confident that in Canada a half-pay officer with little capital could invest in large tracts of land and farm – and live – like a gentleman.

Catherine's remarkable spirit was to be put to the test soon enough. She quickly learned that hard work was necessary and, in the book that she later wrote for the benefit of emigrating gentlewomen, *The Backwoods of Canada*, she was at pains to point out that ladies unused to dirtying their hands "will be wise to lay aside pride and refinement."

Once their first log cabin had been erected at Rice Lake in the province of Ontario, Catherine's work began in earnest. Their new home consisted only of a parlour, a bedroom, a kitchen and a large pantry to begin with, but provided ample scope for her enterprising efforts at home-making. Her parlour – with its Franklin stove and brass fender, the green and white muslin curtains, the Indian mat on the floor and her husband's prized collection of books – was her special pride and joy.

The birth of her first child, James, in June, 1833, increased her workload and with the aid of an Irish girl (hired for three dollars a month) she took responsibility for the poultry, the cows, the fruit and the vegetables that kept them from starvation. By the end of their first year in the Canadian wilds the Traills felt they could view their accomplishments with modest satisfaction: several acres under wheat and sufficient potatoes, corn and turnips in the cellar to ensure their survival during the hard Canadian winter.

Catherine was wise to find satisfaction in such small triumphs. The following years contained few enough of them and the lady did indeed have to "lay aside pride and refinement" as she trudged through the snow in her Indian-made moccasins, worked in the open with a baby strapped papoose-style to her back, struggled to bring up her increasing brood of children with poverty staring her in the face the whole time. Crop failures, fires and the financial collapse that followed William Mackenzie's short-lived rebellion against the colonial government in 1837 meant that immigrant families found the gap between hopes and fulfilment widened every year. Poverty in the backwoods was not the genteel kind that might be discreetly concealed at home; in Canada it was a grinding struggle for existence, it was drinking hemlock-leaf tea, eating bread made from potatoes and watching your children go barefoot in the harsh Canadian climate.

However hard Catherine worked, however much they strove for a more regular source of income, whatever progress was made, the Traills seemed unable to make headway. Just when they were at last gaining ground their farm was seized to pay a friend's debts. But again, her remarkable physical toughness, her dogged optimism and her continuing belief in God combined to save Catherine from despair.

Nor did the unending struggle to survive dull her sympathies or sensibilities. Despite the worst that Canada could do, she found a deep spiritual satisfaction in the countryside and a source of enduring interest in the Indians whom she treated with a warm sympathy. She gradually rediscovered her interest in writing and often laid aside her other labours to write magazine articles and full-length books. Catherine had a total of 17 books published during her lifetime and those written in Canada provided the family with a much-needed source of income, especially when her hard-working but consistently unfortunate husband found himself sued for debt – without a penny to his name. Catherine's *Female Emigrants' Guide* was written in 1854 for the wives and daughters of settlers: in the light of the difficulties under which it was written, it must have been hard for her to tolerate the selling of pirated versions at English seaports, from which she never received a penny. Among her other books, *Canadian Wild Flowers* (1868) and *Studies in the Plant Life in Canada* (1885) constitute classic records of 19th-Century Canadian flora.

The disasters that struck every time she inched her way forward continued throughout the rest of her life. Fire destroyed one farm and the family were able to save only a few sticks of furniture, some clothes and the books from the blaze. On June 21, 1858, Thomas Traill died, broken by work and worry. The death of Catherine's brother Sam in 1867 and, later in the same year, of her son James were painful blows. And, finally, in 1870 a second son, Harry, was killed by an inmate at the Kingston Penitentiary where he was a guard.

Canada had changed almost beyond recognition during Catherine Parr Traill's lifetime, and the steamers, the highways and the new brick-built cottages made the settler's lot a less arduous one. But Catherine's declining years were hard, and poverty dogged her almost until her death in 1899 at the grand age of 98. Her financial worries had ended only three years earlier when a Grant on the Queen's Bounty was made to her as the oldest living authoress in the British Empire. It had taken Catherine Parr Traill nearly a century to make a success of her new life in the new land of Canada.

And with the passage of time the very toughness of the female convict was an asset when she and her mate, after serving their term, assumed the role of respectable settlers.

However, it was the immigration of free men and women that made the largest contribution to the colony's development. Free immigrants were able to obtain subsidized passages to some colonies from 1830, and they started to land in their thousands from 1850 when gold was discovered. Despite the toughness of frontier life, early Australian society tended to be very class-conscious – largely thanks to the efforts of the wives and daughters of the officers and officials who also made the colony their home. Often from very ordinary beginnings themselves, they set themselves apart from the women transportees, determined to establish an "Antipodean society" of families unblemished by convict taint.

But, with the ending of transportation in the mid-19th Century, the division between polite and convict society began to close. This trend was speeded up by the arrival of a third group of women, the "bounty girls." These were girls from poor families who, from the 1830s on, had been brought over to be servants by settlers who received a "bounty" covering the fare from the government.

Imperfect as the convict and bounty girls may have been, they were still a domesticating influence in the frontier society of the outback. Before they started to arrive, the lonely men, desperate for women, made full use of Aborigine women. The unfortunate "gins," as they were called, were sold to lonely graziers by their own menfolk who would eventually receive them back, sick, abused and often dying.

As free immigration developed, as the children of convicts and gold-diggers grew up, as the new colonies – South Australia, Victoria, and Queensland – were established with little or no convict element, so the pattern changed. By the mid-19th Century, women were carrying out their normal role as the champions of family life and public morality. Guided by the Churches, reacting against the brutality of early Australian society, they adopted the conventional standards of suburban mid-Victorian England. In the end they achieved as decisive a victory over drink and bawdiness as the Canadian women had won over the wilderness.

In New Zealand there were no convicts, and most settlement from 1840 on was organized by colonizing companies. Having seen propaganda pictures circulated by the companies, the settlers arrived believing their land was already surveyed and allotted and expecting a minimum of hardship. If they were too poor to buy land, they thought there would be ample paid work.

But in the North Island things were not at all like this. It was soon discovered that most of the land the New Zealand Company claimed to have "bought" from the Maoris had not been bought at all, and if it had, the Maoris did not understand that they had sold it and refused to accept white occupation. Settlers and their wives had a difficult thirty years. In addition to the normal difficulty of breaking in heavily forested land to agriculture, they faced the danger of attacks by Maori tribes. Many isolated families had hair-raising experiences during the wars of the 1860s and some lost their lives.

In the South Island, however, there were few Maoris and, in place of inhospitable forest there were the grasslands of Canterbury – an endless expanse of tussock and bush. Here, if anywhere, a woman of character and modest means could hope to enjoy the positive advantages of settler life. One who did was Lady Barker, who went out to New Zealand in 1860. Her married name was then Mrs. Frederick Broome, but her first husband had been Sir George Barker, and she used his name as an author describing her life in New Zealand in two classic books, *Station Life in New Zealand*, and *Station Amusements in New Zealand*. Her life in Canterbury in the second half of the 19th Century was a sharp contrast to the experience of Mrs. Traill in Canada and showed how in a new colony emigrants with some money could quickly reproduce the pleasant life of middle-class Britain in a land the other side of the world.

Her husband – 11 years younger than she and only 23 when the couple emigrated in 1865 – had already visited New Zealand in 1857 and knew something of sheep-farming. He was able to buy a partnership in an existing sheep station – 9,700 acres of hill land – some 45 miles from Christchurch; and when the couple arrived, the main farm buildings and the flock of sheep were awaiting them. In their case, there was no agonizing first year spent in clearing the land and establishing a farm. However, they did build their own small house: a characteristic colonial building whose walls were "only one plank an inch thick, a lining-board and canvas and paper, between you and a hard frost," as Lady Barker wrote in her first cold winter there. There were two small living-rooms, two bedrooms and a servant's room, small by the standards of middle-class life at home but larger and much more comfortable than the homes built of cob by poorer settlers of the time. Lady Barker compensated for lack of space by surrounding herself with personal possessions which reminded her of home. In the dining-room there were "books in every available corner, prints on the walls, and a trophy of Indian swords and hunting spears [her first husband had served in India] over the fireplace." She thought it "a great mistake not to bring such things . . . for they are not to be bought here and they give the new house a certain likeness to the old one which is always delightful."

Life was in many ways very different from anything the Barkers could have experienced at home. To meet friends meant riding many miles across rough tracks, fording snow-fed rivers that might suddenly flood and sweep you away. Stores had to come by bullock-cart from Christchurch, and to visit that metropolis of colonial life one had to swim the horses behind river ferries. Winds could blow with hurricane force; and, until the newly planted trees and bushes had time to grow, there was no protection for man or beast. Snow was a major hazard: one might be caught in a blizzard when travelling or be marooned for long periods at home. One winter, when the snow melted, the Barkers found that half their sheep and almost all their lambs – their main capital asset – were dead.

# WOMEN WITH A MISSION

**Though most women who left England to travel out to the corners of the Empire went to join their husbands, they were, nevertheless, accompanied on the liners and steam trains by other groups of women who were driven by a sense of personal mission. Some, like the missionaries to the East shown on this page, went because they were sure God was calling them; some, more interested in the bodies than the souls of the Queen-Empress's subjects, went as nurses; some were simply looking for the sheer excitement of discovering new people and places.**

Mrs. Watt, wife of the Reverend F.J. Watt and missionary in her own right, poses in China with her family in 1920.

The ladies of the Mid-China Mission meet in 1897 for their first conference in China to thrash out a policy for the forthcoming year. The women missionaries in China dealt mainly with the female members of their flocks.

The formidable Australian deaconess, Ellen Mort of the Fukien Mission in China, stands next to her sedan-chair before setting off on a journey to the interior.

# The Globe Trotteresses

Some lady explorers were once greeted at a party with the patronizing words, "Three globe trotteresses all at once!"

The remark was typical of the jocular attitude most men – and women – took to the strange breed of lady travellers. Nevertheless, from the 1870s, more and more women were escaping from their restrictive Victorian upbringing into the freedom of the Empire. Some, like Lady Stone, whose travels are shown on this page, insisted on accompanying their husbands to the remote corners of the Empire; others took off on their own. May French Sheldon travelled East Africa on foot at the head of 150 porters, Mary Kingsley paddled a canoe among the cannibal tribes of Nigeria and Fanny Bullock Workman rode a bicycle through the Himalayas.

Many of the lady travellers were feminists, anxious to prove they were as good as men. They were furious to find that the ultimate accolade for explorers, a Fellowship of the Royal Geographical Society, was denied them until 1933. Nevertheless, even without recognition, these women, mostly middle-aged and often ill, travelled all over the world to reach places where no European male had set foot.

**Lady Jane Stone, wife of the photographer Sir Benjamin Stone who took the pictures on this page, sits patiently under her parasol in Zululand while a servant loads up.**

**Lady Stone prepares to urge a slow, cumbersome ox-wagon along a boggy South African "carriage road."**

**Lady Stone poses for her husband in the company of some African dancers, looking incongruous in her straitlaced Victorian costume.**

Victorian largesse is handed out to the Zulus by Lady Stone in the form of sugar, introduced to South Africa in 1850.

# The Ladies of the Lamp

Florence Nightingale did more than just revolutionize the practice of nursing by her work in the Crimean War and after: she also made it possible for a gentlewoman to follow a paid profession, and women of all classes eagerly took up their opportunity to minister to the sick and dying of the world.

Until Miss Nightingale's reforms, most women working as nurses in the Empire were first and foremost missionaries. Even if the mission did not have a hospital attached to it, the missionaries were never without their box of medicine brought from home. The intrepid West African explorer and trader Mary Kingsley extricated herself from a tense situation with a threatening chief by successfully lancing an abscess on his mother's arm.

From the 1870s, however, non-religious hospitals began to be established, staffed largely by British nurses. After a long struggle for recognition lady doctors became accepted and, by 1896, there were 50 qualified women doctors in India alone, one of whom was the Chief Physician of a hospital in Bombay.

**Umbrellas shading them from the sun, nurses take a break from nursing Bombay plague victims in 1896.**

**Nurses inspect smallpox convalescents in an open-air hospital near Zanzibar.**

**The Mbweni people of Zanzibar wait patiently for their medicine. It took the European doctors, nurses and missionaries a long time to wean the primitive African tribes from fear of the witch-doctors.**

**Blind Chinese boys stand grouped around their nurse. Mission-hospitals like this one were often the only places where medical treatment could be found in remote country-areas.**

# II. White Women against a Dusky Background

There was a world of difference between the settlers colonies and the tropical Empire. In New Zealand's South Island, for example, young British families found many compensations for the hardships of winter. There was the joy of long rides across open country in the clear air and brilliant sun of winter. There was ample sport – hunting wild boar and wild cattle, sailing on Lake Coleridge, skating, camping and endless picnics.

Occasionally they would taste civilization in Christchurch. Although this was a dull little provincial town by British standards, there were shops, dances, amateur theatricals and plenty of private entertainments. For all the very hard work and the occasional tragedy, it must have been a tremendous experience to be a young and vigorous woman, with the security of some money behind you, in the first years of the Canterbury settlement, when everything was still new.

In the tropics, conditions were very different, and during the pioneering years women played no part. The British were there to fight, to rule, but not to settle, and since they believed all this was best done without the help of women, many left their wives and families behind. This was the world of Kipling's strong men. Few Britons made permanent homes here, and if they did they tended to "go native," losing caste and earning the contempt of Europeans and natives alike.

In these early days, the men lived as bachelors. Although they tried to maintain what they regarded as British standards, they tended to adapt themselves to the alien society in which they lived: many found native concubines; others became interested in native language and customs; in the East, some adopted native dress off duty. Though they were conquerors, many became very friendly with the local people. These contacts were closest in places such as the Middle East and southern Asia where Europeans often found much in common with those they were sent to rule – with Indian rajahs and fighting men from the North-West Frontier, for example. Europeans found less in common with the "babu" of Bengal and the pagan tribes of tropical Africa. But although the degree of intimacy varied from place to place in those days, it was never so great later, particularly after the Indian Mutiny.

As life in a tropical colony became safer and small communities of administrators, soldiers and traders grew up in the main ports or towns, a trickle of wives came out to accompany their husbands. Later still, especially in India, single women – known as "the fishing fleet" – went out to find husbands where women were in short supply and marital competition less intense than at home.

For good and ill these women made an immense impact on European life in the tropics. It has been said that they ruined British relations with the subject peoples. Inevitably they put an end to the bachelor delights of their menfolk, pulling them back from their free and easy life, cutting their contacts with Indians or Africans and drawing them into a society

**The beautiful Lady Minto (in the litter), wife of the fourth Lord Minto, Viceroy of India from 1905 to 1910, was accustomed to explore with the comfort of many servants.**

consisting of other married Europeans. Little British colonies grew up, separate from the native society around them; Asians and Africans were very rarely invited to European homes. Men of different races could, and still did, meet at work, but an iron curtain descended to divide their private lives. It had become a white world and one in which white women played a leading role.

India was the first tropical country to which British women went to live, and wives, daughters and sisters of East India Company officials, military men and civil servants had been going out there since the 1760s. Though travelling to India was an easy and well-planned operation compared with the rough-and-ready voyages to the settler colonies, the journey east must have been a daunting one for most future memsahibs. Unlike the tough settler women who crowded into the immigrant boats to Canada, these travellers were simply not used to hard lives. They were, in the main, women of the middle and upper classes, accustomed to the pleasant, well-ordered life of the town house and the country estate, and it is not hard to understand the dismay of the Eden sisters, for instance, when their bachelor brother Lord Auckland was appointed Governor-General in 1835 and they learned they would have to go to Calcutta with him to help run his household and act as his hostesses.

Yet they went. Gamely they packed the sofa and wash-stand, the looking-glass and the chest of drawers for the voyage. The three pairs of stays that ladies were recommended to take with them on the journey must have been a penance to wear in a congested cabin, on a rough ship, and beneath the tropical sun. But for the well-bred woman there was little possibility of removing them: when in 1821 Georgina Cherry and her sister sailed to join their father in Masulipatam, he stressed in a long letter how important it was that his daughters should always dress as if going out into company: "It is one of the most pleasing parts of an English Lady's Education," he assured them, "that she is always properly dressed to see Visitors and can never be surprised in a state of Undress."

During the voyage, the women could also reflect on what would have to be done for their children. By the time the children were seven (sooner if possible), they would have to go back to Britain since a British education was considered essential. Their mothers would have to reconcile themselves to a painful separation unless, of course, they returned home themselves with the children – which meant leaving a husband who might seek consolation from an Indian mistress. Some had to leave the children at home from the outset. Poor Mrs. Russell, a friend of the Edens, arrived to dinner one evening "half broken hearted at leaving four children at home in the care of strangers."

A middle course was recommended by some old Indian hands. Three years with the children and three with the husband, never leaving either for any longer. Even in an age accustomed to long separations from those they loved, the prospect must have been a disheartening one.

At least to begin with, the newly arrived ladies could draw comfort from their appearance and, in particular, their delightful pink and white complexions and their fashionable wardrobes. Neither alas, was to endure in the cruel Indian climate. Successive bouts of fever would transform the rose into primrose, and in some cases to a deeper, even more unlovely shade of orange. Clothes rotted in the dreadful humidity. Emily Eden had the very disconcerting experience of hearing her dress go "crack" one evening at dinner – and go on cracking until, as she confessed with an endearing lack of embarrassment, the skirt resembled a series of pink ribbons.

But even before dresses began to disintegrate and complexions turn yellow, the realities of life in India would have become apparent, in particular the appalling quality of the heat. During the hot weather one might, if one rose early enough, manage to fit in a ride before breakfast, but between breakfast and luncheon a little sewing was about as much as could be accomplished, while after lunch to relax in one's room was the ideal until the happy hour of 5.30 when the temperature began to go down and it

**A well-to-do tourist poses in front of a Sinhalese statue. In the late 19th Century, Anglo-Indian ladies often went travelling to see the sights of their adopted land.**

was possible to go for a carriage drive before dinner.

Boredom ran the climate a close second in the exile of India. Until the cold season few activities were possible, while virtually every manual task was removed from the lady's hands by her train of servants. They might be idle, dirty and stupid, but even a relatively modest establishment could not survive without at least a cook, scullion, sweeper, water-carrier, washerman, maid and outdoor staff. It was to fill these long, hot, idle hours that women took to writing the countless letters, diaries and chits to friends that give a remarkably complete picture of their lives, telling of the way they created a little England in the tropics. Letters home told of the formal dinner parties they gave at which the unsuitably attired guests gathered to drink copious quantities of claret and eat huge, badly cooked meals. Such evenings were often agonizingly tedious, enlivened only by the possibility of a newcomer making a social gaffe, natural hazards in the shape of flying insects, or unnatural ones like the flounce of the punkah falling off.

Pastimes were strictly limited for ladies. Walking – when it was cool enough – was one option open to them, and a gentle ride (side-saddle) was also permitted: it took a daring woman like the notorious Mrs. Bristow to ride astride. Some ladies, including the Governor-General's young sister, Fanny Eden, elected to go on a tiger hunt when the opportunity arose. With 200 servants in attendance, however, the discomforts she encountered were minimal.

The less adventurous passed the long hours in such time-honoured feminine pursuits as sketching, painting, playing cards and making music on pianos whose tone had been ruined by the climate. Private balls and private theatricals offered some diversion – and the opportunity for a little discreet flirtation, particularly in the fertile ground of the hill-stations, where dashing military wives, grass widows and military men on leave gathered in the fresh mountain air to forget their lassitude, throw aside conventions and even lose their boredom in a round of musical tableaux, farces and parties. There was probably less adultery than the gossips hoped; but the combina-

# Mary Slessor: The Africans' "White Ma"

It says a lot for the missionary Mary Slessor that, on first meeting her, the hypercritical, individualistic trader and explorer, Mary Kingsley, decided she liked her. Miss Kingsley had little time for missionaries with their priggish dedication to the improvement of natives, but she found Miss Slessor's affectionate involvement with the African very much to her liking. What Mary Kingsley did not perhaps appreciate was that Mary Slessor's unconventional methods were gaining more souls for God than any of the more straitlaced West African missionaries.

Mary Slessor's working-class background and her first-hand experience of poverty, hunger and disease helped her adapt with remarkable ease to the rigours of a missionary life in West Africa and made her ready to accept the natives among whom she made her life. She was born in 1849, the daughter of a Scottish drunkard, and raised in an Aberdeen slum. By the time she started work at the age of 11, she was already a tough woman. Her interest in religion came from her mother, a weaver who found strength to endure the hardships of everyday life in deep piety. Like most missionaries, Mary Slessor experienced a dramatic conversion, a blinding revelation of God's purpose for her, and from this she drew the unshakable conviction that her salvation was in God, come what may, since God was always with her. "God and one are always a majority," she once scribbled in one of her Bibles.

God's purpose led Mary to apply for service in Calabar, West Africa, and in 1876 she set sail for the Niger Coast, the "White Man's Grave." She was undaunted by the fact that she would be facing not only disease but a cruel wilderness where many of the tribesmen were cannibals and slavery was still common though it had been officially abolished 31 years before.

In fact, even the challenge of Calabar was not enough for Mary. She was young, full of enthusiasm, clearly at home with the native tribes, and had an unshakable belief in her calling. She badly wanted to escape the relative comfort of Calabar and go to work in the interior.

But she had to wait. After a furlough in 1879, she was given charge of the Old Town, only three miles along the Calabar River, where, working alone except for the help of one young Efik tribeswoman, she could live with the people "as one of themselves." She ate native food, and was apparently free from the widespread missionary neurosis about clothes. While she believed that wearing a garment never failed to create self-respect, she did not feel it necessary to brave the tropical sun in the heavy, clumsy clothes Victorians thought essential for their health and reputations. With a remarkable disregard for her own well-being she would go her rounds hatless and barefoot. On one occasion, however, when her presence was urgently needed to prevent a ritual killing, Mary Slessor did make an effort to dress the part and got herself up in gown, hat, boots, stockings and umbrella. But unfortunately it began to rain and she

found her wet clothes such a hindrance that one by one they were discarded and she arrived at her destination dressed only in a chemise.

It was her personal, caring involvement with the Africans – a reflection of her belief in a personal caring God – that helped her to bring about much-needed reforms in Calabar, in particular the suppression of twin murder. Twins were regarded as an abomination by the Africans who thought that one of the children must be the offspring of an evil spirit. Since no one could tell which, both babies were brutally killed by breaking their backs and pushing them, still alive, into clay pots. The unfortunate mother was cast out of the village, spurned by her husband and family and forbidden to contaminate any house or path others might use. Though treaties between successive British consuls and Calabar chiefs helped to stamp out the practice in the towns, rural areas remained almost unaffected by these reforms. Mary, who in the Old Town had long cared for twins she had saved, found ample scope not only to continue her rescue work on twins and their mothers but to improve the lot of women in general.

Malaria sent her home in 1883 – and with her went one of her favourite twins, a six-month old baby girl, Atim Eso, whom she had christened Janie. Back in Britain, calls on her time and energy were heavy. After two years giving lectures on missionary work (which she found a torture) and teaching (at which she was remarkably good), she decided it was time to resume her missionary work. In 1885 she returned to Calabar, this time to Creek Town. There she quickly acquired a houseful of children who were to comfort her when, within three months of each other, her mother and her invalid sister both died.

It was at this time that the wish she had held for so long was granted. Trade was opening up the interior and the isolation of the inland tribes was coming to an end. The mission at Calabar felt it was now vital to strengthen their up-river stations.

Few missionaries were better equipped for the job than Mary Slessor, and in 1888 she set out by canoe for Ekenge. There she worked with the Okoyong, a tribe so wild that most missionaries considered them beyond redemption. Mary not only worked among them but, as was now becoming a pattern, lived intimately with them, together with her five adopted children, under conditions of both hardship and danger.

But it was not all sacrifice. Inland, far away from the casual European visitor and the more fusty of the missionaries, she could finally abandon the civilized frills she had found so tiresome in Calabar and devote her energies to "daily mixing with the people." Convinced that God was on her side (in the jungle she relied on His protection alone against wild animals), she tackled every problem as it arose. She taught reading and arithmetic, fought against the perennial demon drink, nursed orphaned babies, gave religious instruction and treated the sick and injured – in the process graduating from a total reliance on quinine, Epsom salts and laudanum to an informed use of native herbs and remedies.

On a broader front she tried to divert the energies of the Okoyong away from petty wars and witchcraft and into commerce. Like David Livingstone, she believed the profits from ordinary trade would help stamp out the traffic in men and spirits. Her successes were considerable. To the natives she was the respected "White Ma," to the young administrators the "White Queen of the Okoyong." Her influence over the people gained formal recognition when she was made Britain's first Vice-Consul in Okoyong.

But for all the bustle, her life was a solitary struggle. An engagement to Charles Morrison, a teacher 18 years her junior, came to nothing when he was invalided home; Susie, a much-loved twin baby, was accidentally scalded to death; and she was repeatedly desolated by the deaths of friends and of the abandoned babies she so quickly learned to love. Even those of her "family" who survived were, in later years, to cause her pain: suspended between two worlds, they could often find happiness in neither.

With her health failing, she went on to pioneer in the Ibo and Ibibio lands, dispensing her own brand of unorthodox justice, almost always ruling in favour of women. Notwithstanding recurrent attacks of dysentery, agonizing boils that covered her face and head, she rode doggedly about on her newly-acquired bicycle and made long and arduous voyages by canoe, dosing herself heavily with the opium-based laudanum in order to sleep.

Her achievements in Christianizing and civilizing the tribes she worked with were widely acclaimed, though eyebrows continued to be raised at her methods. In July, 1913, Mary was summoned to Calabar, where she was honoured with the Order of St. John for which Lord Lugard, the Governor of Nigeria, had recommended her.

After her death in 1915 she was granted a magnificent funeral in London with flags at half-mast, schools, offices and shops closed – a fuss that would probably have appalled this blunt Scotswoman who hated ceremony.

tion of military men on leave and amateur theatricals was regarded as a heady one.

Yet the apparent shallowness and insufferable snobbery of the Anglo-Indian ladies overlaid a profound dedication to what they saw as their duty. They stayed on in India with their husbands despite the cruel climate, separation from children, a desperate longing for home and family, constant ill health and the knowledge that death would come early. For those in remote stations life was even bleaker, for there were no friends to call on and gossip with – and isolation could have a very alarming effect upon them: of the three married ladies at one station the Eden sisters visited, one flatly refused to entertain and another had had her head shaved and wore a brown silk cushion with a cap pinned on top because she could not get a wig.

When the Indian Mutiny broke out in 1857, this sense of duty, married to redoubtable courage and self-sacrifice, was in evidence time and again. In the siege of Lucknow, Katherine Bartrum, wife of the surgeon at the tiny outstation of Gonda, spent her time in the besieged Residency, "fully occupied," as she later wrote, "in nursing, washing our clothes together with cups and saucers, and fanning away the flies which have become a fearful nuisance." Her hands covered in boils she continued to tend the sick and dying; she was only 23 years old when the Mutiny robbed her of both her husband and her baby.

In Africa, as well as in India, British women lived out their lives against a "dusky background," in the words of a 19th-Century euphemism. But in Africa – particularly West Africa – there were too few of them to have any appreciable effect upon the quality of colonial society. Their reluctance to go to West Africa is not surprising: known as the "White Man's Grave," it offered little in the way of blandishments, at least until the end of the 19th Century and until the 1860s the appalling voyage out could take as long as three months.

It was not until the 1890s that wives of Europeans took advantage of the new steamer service and began to arrive in West Africa in any numbers – only to discover, in many cases, that their menfolk had grown weary of waiting and

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# WOMEN OF IMPERIAL PLEASURE

**Life was hard on the frontiers of Empire, especially in the gold-fields and diamond-mines of Canada, Australia and South Africa. No "lady" in her right mind was going to make her life out there – but the men needed women. And women they got – tough girls flocking out in their thousands in search of wealth, fame and excitement, to work as dancers, barmaids, actresses and prostitutes. They had to work hard for their money, starting with the journey to the diggings. The women who went to the Klondike had to climb mountains and cross frozen passes; before the coming of the railway in 1894, the Kimberley girls had to trek to Johannesburg in ox-wagons. But once they arrived at their destinations, the pickings were good. Men who had been poor all their lives were digging fortunes out of the ground and, dizzy with wealth, were paying in nuggets and diamonds for everything from girls to groceries. The whores may not have had hearts of gold, but they certainly had pockets full of it.**

**During the hey-day of the Klondike gold rush of 1897 to 1898, Vivien (top left), improbably dubbed "a Texas Steer," entertained the men in Dawson, as did the dancer (centre top) modestly wearing a woollen vest to cover her corseted midriff. The "actresses" (above) ford a river in their arduous journey to the goldfields.**

"Morning" (top right), a pin-up who delighted the miners at the Klondike goldfields, gazes soulfully at the camera. The quick-change artiste (above), shown in three of the different costumes she wore at Kimberley, had a considerably more active method of earning her share of the riches that were going.

# Lady Florence Dixie: Champion of the Zulus

The announcement in the *Morning Post* that the Editor proposed sending a woman war-correspondent to the Transvaal to cover the 1880 Boer insurrection occasioned a good deal of mirth. Few people took the appointment seriously – unless, that is, they happened to know Lady Florence Dixie, the spirited appointee.

Lady Florence, daughter of the eighth Marquess of Queensberry, was born on May 24, 1855. Her early life was anything but conventional. The deaths of her father, who died in a shooting accident (rumoured to be suicide) when she was three years old, and her brother Francis a few years later on the Matterhorn (this time gossip whispered murder), combined to make her something other than a docile Victorian. She grew up first a wilful tomboy and then a "larky young lady" who refused to grow her hair, rode and swam as well as a man.

Her taste for travel, and especially travel of an exotic nature, became apparent early in her marriage to Sir Alexander Beaumont Dixie and, in 1878, only two months after the birth of her son, she set sail for Patagonia, having firmly cast herself in the romantic role of the white-woman explorer. Her exciting six months in Patagonia, the vast central highlands of Argentina, resulted in *Across Patagonia*, a best seller that recounted how she slept in the saddle, half starved to death, and survived both a pampas fire and earthquakes.

Patagonia went no way towards satisfying her desire for travel – and neither did her next trip to California, which she found far too civilized for her liking. A voyage through Alaska to "Far-off Tuski Land" seemed to offer rather more promise, but on December 16, 1880, the Transvaal Boers declared themselves independent – and she was offered the Transvaal journalistic assignment. For a restless young woman with a rock-solid belief in the virtues of the British Empire the offer was irresistible.

Her arrival in Pietermaritzburg must have resolved many of the doubts of those who saw something inappropriate in the idea of a lady war "special." Dressed in a man's hat and coat, a very short habit, and a pair of "unmistakable but untanned Wellington boots," she was clearly not likely to let her sex prove an obstacle to the conduct of her profession.

As luck would have it, however, her original assignment never got off the ground: a peace treaty was signed with the Boer leaders, and Lady Florence found herself covering not the war, but the peace, a task she accomplished in a bellicose fashion.

When the peace negotiators moved their deliberations to Pretoria, Lady Florence, eager to indulge in some hard riding and sleeping under the stars, had no hesitation about going along as well. When she reached her destination she fully exploited her rather unusual talent as a newsgetter, showing no scruples about sitting under the windows of the conference room, eavesdropping. The conference bored her, and her profound lack of sympathy with the Boers made her an unsatisfactory reporter.

But if she failed to learn anything about the Boers, on a visit to Cape Town during the course of the conference, she did become aware of the problems of the Africans. A deputation of South African tribesmen arrived at Government House to plead for the British to remain in the Transvaal, since they feared that the Boers would slaughter their people. At the time, Lady Florence saw them only as ammunition with which to attack the hated Boers. Nevertheless, in this encounter there was also the germ of a concern that was to grow into a serious, informed and deeply felt passion.

Her meetings shortly after with the deposed Zulu King Cetshwayo was another significant milestone on the same road. Cetshwayo lived in exile at Oude Molen, a farm outside Cape Town, and Lady Florence was sufficiently moved by the plight of this allegedly "ignorant and bloodthirsty despot" for her to promise to visit Zululand and bring him back news of his country. A threat of a Zulu uprising prevented her so instead she made a trip to Kimberley that further nourished her growing sympathy for the black South Africans. The appalling conditions at the Government Hospital evoked a sense of deep compassion in a woman who hitherto had shown little evidence of tender feelings. On the very same day that she visited the hospital her previously untroubled faith in the Empire was to be somewhat shaken by the discovery that two elderly African chiefs, whose only crime had been that of fighting for their country, were lumped in with all the common criminals in the town jail.

When Lady Florence eventually made her visit to Zululand, she was little surprised to find that among the people she met Cetshwayo was regarded as something rather less than the tyrant the British government had claimed – and had used as a justification for deposing him. Bishop Colenso of Natal, who had long been campaigning for justice for the black man, was only too happy to enlist her support. Their meeting was to complete her conversion to the cause of the Zulus.

To fight for Cetshwayo's restoration she used her pen to greater effect than ever before, with letters to newspapers and articles in magazines spelling out the detailed history of the case. She earned a welter of insults for her pains from the British press, who particularly objected to the spending of the taxpayers' money on the Zulu King's projected visit to London. But despite newspaper hostility and a good measure of official procrastination, Cetshwayo arrived in London on August 5, 1882. His visit was a success and his return to Zululand, which now seemed to British officials the best way of securing peace in a troubled area, was assured. "Once again in the world's history have woman's persuasions proved mightier than the counsels of statesmanship," the *Natal Mercury* bitterly commented.

The King's restoration provided Lady Florence with a respite from African affairs and an opportunity to transfer her attention to other challenging issues. One was Irish Home Rule, a subject of traditionally high passions. (There was even an attempt to stab her; her whalebone stays saved her by deflecting the knife.) Sex equality was another subject close to her heart, expounded both in theory – in *Gloriana: or, The Revolution of 1900* – and in practice: she and her husband took it as a matter of course that on their travels "Beau" did the cooking while Florence tended the horses.

By the time of her death in 1905, her advanced attitudes still seemed eccentric to most people. But her views about the rights of black South Africans won wide acceptance. Few people had been interested in their fate until her acid pen etched their plight on the public mind.

enlivened the passing years by taking a black mistress. The existence of a concubine and, worse, a black one, must have been a shocking blow to the sensibilities of a wife fresh from Britain.

Nor were black concubines the only shock in store at the conclusion of the journey to West Africa. Dysentery, jaundice, Asiatic cholera, typhoid, malaria, blackwater fever and yellow fever made survival a chancy affair. The humid heat, too, was terrible. "Every article of furniture is shrinking and cracking – paper and the boards of books curling up – veneer peeling off and the strings of the pianoforte breaking," one official's wife wrote hopelessly from Freetown, Sierra Leone. At least she was able to console herself with the fact that it was worse in Gambia where it caused the panes of doors to shrink and drop out "and glass to become so brittle that it snaps asunder though untouched by any person."

As in India the British helped keep homesickness at bay by dressing for dinner and celebrating Christmas with plum pudding. Circumstances were against them though. The introduction of bottled perishables in 1840, tinned meat in the 1860s and frozen meat in the 1880s might have made life easier for the ambitious hostess, but successful dinner-parties were none the less rare, for it was hard to ignore the insects and the determination of the gentlemen to become as drunk as possible.

At least the habit of dressing in heavy woollen clothes on formal occasions eventually receded as people became more aware of the necessity of wearing lightweight clothes in the tropics. One could not go too far, however: to the Victorians the wearing of clothes was a primary expression of their civilization, which meant that they had always to appear suitably clad before the impressionable natives in the hope that this would help wean them away from their dreadful un-Christian habit of going around naked.

For the woman whose eventual destination was not West Africa but the Cape, life was considerably less difficult. There were more Europeans, the climate was better, there was a lower incidence of diseases that made life in West Africa so appalling – and there were plenty of servants. Admittedly, the "indolence, stupidity and want of tidiness" one newly arrived wife accused them of threw many proper Victorian women into despair. (Women in every corner of the Empire were continually complaining about the quality of the servants.) Nevertheless, what the servants lacked in quality they made up in quantity, which left the ladies free to pursue genteelly robust activities like gardening and tending the more docile of the livestock. And, of course, enjoying themselves. Cape Town might not have been as sophisticated as London, but it was lively enough with dinners and balls – the waltz and quadrille were particularly popular – parties and picnics, croquet and walking. There were amateur theatricals, too, and from 1807 Cape Town had its own theatre.

The really energetic had time for yet more delightful diversions. Lady Anne Barnard, wife of the Colonial Secretary at the Cape in the early 19th Century, cheerfully went on camping expeditions in late middle age. Throughout the following century a surprising number of middle- and upper-class ladies became devotees of the outdoor life. By the turn of the century the British woman, with her tropical clothes, Thermos flask, Beecham's powders and portable iron was a common sight in the wilds.

Not that all the women who went to South Africa had time for such exotic pastimes. From 1820 a new, tough breed of settlers started arriving at the Cape and for them life was the familiar, grinding round of hard work and child-bearing. These strong resourceful farm women were surprisingly adept at coping with childbirth without doctors, whether it occurred in a crowded immigrant ship or an upcountry station.

With the expansion of the frontier, a gradual change took place in the role that women played in South African society. Towns that had once been little more than frontier posts became centres of inland settlement life, with coffee-houses and assembly-rooms to demonstrate their newfound respectability. As in Australia, however, there were still too few women to go round, and in 1862 the Female Middle Class Emigrations Society was set up to speed the flow of unmarried governesses to South Africa who could eventually be expected to marry and settle there.

Not all women went to Africa with matrimony as their only goal – indeed in many ways Africa seemed to offer a woman a unique opportunity for realizing her potential as an individual. Some combined self-fulfilment with marriage: the wives of missionaries, for instance, were permitted – indeed encouraged – to play a large number of roles and were variously teacher, pioneer, helpmeet and example to the uncivilized African. Others, while avoiding marital ties, certainly found men necessary for success. Africa proved an irresistible lure for fortune-hunters at all levels, from the prostitutes of gold-boom towns to the rather more discreet ladies of fortune like Lady Avonmore, a clever adventuress who managed to persuade everyone that she had been married in secret to Napoleon III's son.

Still others found what they were seeking from life without relying upon men at all. They came to Africa and found there a chance to renounce Victorian conventions and live the life they wanted to live rather than the one that society decreed they should. One such woman was Sarah Heckford. Irish, crippled and as tough as nails, she cheerfully slept rough with the men and proceeded to make no mean reputation for herself as a trader in the Transvaal.

Apart from the many wives and fewer individualists, there was another group, a very small group, of British women who through their involvement with the Empire not only attained a quite remarkable degree of personal distinction, but left an indelible mark upon its history. Foremost among them were Annie Besant, joint founder of Indian nationalism; Emily Hobhouse, reporter of the defects of concentration camps in South Africa; Mary Kingsley, explorer of West Africa and critic of established methods of colonial rule; Flora Shaw, woman journalist and influential source of imperial ideas; Gertrude Bell, associate of T.E. Lawrence in Arabia; Margery Perham, champion of African rights in the 20th Century. The significance of their careers, even though they might vigorously have denied it, was at least partly that they were women operating in a man's world although many people regarded them as

eccentrics simply because they dared to flout Victorian convention in this way.

Annie Besant capitalized on her beauty to call attention to the many good causes she espoused when still a young woman in London. One was population control, another the improvement of conditions for London's working girls. It has been said that during her long life (1847–1933) Annie Besant espoused enough causes to fill nine lifetimes. She herself believed she had already lived through 600 lives on earth before her present one.

Her belief in reincarnation sprang from her consuming interest in theosophy, described by the Theosophical Society as the "study and elucidation of occultism." The society had branches in London, India and Ceylon and it was theosophy that, in 1893, first took her to India.

Not long after her arrival there, she decided that Hinduism was compatible with theosophy; more important, that it was philosophically and morally on a higher plane than anything the West had to offer. It was from this base that she moved into the general arena of Indian culture, showing the same kind of application to the struggle for Indian self-rule as she had to her earlier campaigns. From 1895 India and Indian affairs were the focal point of her active life. In 1899 she founded the Central Hindu College (her ability to flatter wealthy Hindus, notably the Maharajah of Benares, considerably aided her efforts) and in 1904 this was followed by the foundation of the Central Hindu girls' school, which played an important role in the educational emancipation of Indian women. Together these formed the basis of the Hindu University which was opened in 1916.

She became a major protagonist in the battle for Indian home rule. With her newspaper *New India* to give voice to her views, she carried on the struggle throughout the First World War (she was, in fact, interned for a time by the British). In 1918 her steadfastness received its appropriate reward when she was elected President of the Indian National Congress, but this triumph was to represent the peak of her achievement and in the following year she was displaced by Mahatma Gandhi, with whom she disagreed violently about how the fight for home rule should be conducted. Despite her flowing white robes, her yoga exercises and the vegetarian diet she had remained obdurately British, doggedly admiring British discipline, law and organization. There was no room in her scheme of things for Gandhi's policy of outright defiance of the British government.

Naturally, her apparently pro-British stance alienated nationalists in India, and by 1920 her political career had virtually ended. Ostensibly she had failed and it would not be difficult to find reasons for her lack of success: she was emotional and some say eventually unstable; she allowed herself to become involved in some ill-judged adventures as, for instance, when she insisted that her adopted son was the new Messiah; not least, she was a woman – and an Englishwoman at that; and – according to Jawarhalal Nehru – she never had the contact with the Indian people she believed she had.

Nevertheless, as Nehru himself saw, she drew the attention of Indians to their heritage and made them proud of it, perhaps the most essential prerequisite of any successful movement for independence. It has been said that had Annie Besant been taken more seriously then independence would have come to India sooner than it did.

In the same way it can be argued that if greater heed had been paid to Emily Hobhouse, whose campaigns revealed the appalling conditions in Britain's concentration camps during the Boer War, British relations with South Africa after 1902 might have got off on a better footing. For though, in the short term, she achieved humanitarian reforms, in the long run, her achievements must be counted few.

By the time of the Boer War in 1899 Emily Hobhouse had already been involved with different kinds of social work, both in the United States (where she worked with a colony of exiled Cornishmen) and in Britain with the problems of women in industry. A passionate and sensitive woman, she abhorred war and its effects on innocent women and children. She was opposed to the war in South Africa from the start. When the Boers in the British concentration camps started to die in their thousands, Emily Hobhouse decided to act.

With the £300 she had raised for relief, she set sail for Cape Town on December 7, 1900 as representative of the South African Women's and Children's Distress Fund. Conditions in the camps were as bad as she had expected, with mothers separated from their children, disease rampant and even pregnant women sleeping on the ground. It was a prime example, in her eyes, of "crass male ignorance, stupidity, helplessness and muddling." The immediate need as she saw it was to improve conditions in the camps; if the British would not allow the inmates to leave, then they must be maintained in tolerable conditions – which meant more food, mattresses, soap and boilers for sterilizing the water. It also meant a change in attitude among the British guards.

Despite the intensely personal nature of her involvement with those who were suffering in the camps, her assessment of the situation remained creditably objective (a later Report of the Ladies Commission bore out her findings). Neither did she fail to recognize the need for fundamental policy changes – which meant returning home and bringing pressure to bear on the government. She got back to England in 1901 where she struggled to enlist support for her proposed reforms, bombarded M.P.s with letters – and, for her pains, was refused permission for a return visit to South Africa. When she did return to Cape Town later in the year she was not allowed to leave the ship and eventually sent back to England.

Still she struggled on. In 1903 she was back again in Cape Town where her visits to the war-ravaged areas and her efforts to develop some kind of cottage industry among the Boers were long remembered.

With the British government, however, she enjoyed less success. Opinion was running strongly against the Boers and a woman who could sympathize with their sufferings (even if she did on occasions nurse sick Tommies as well) was suspect. While she did obtain her short-term objective of improving conditions in some camps, the overall level of mortality was appalling and, in terms of the long-term political solution of the Boer question, it is unlikely that her opposition to British policy had any appreciable effect on the eventual settlement of the war.

# Daisy Bates: Blood Sister of the Aborigines

At Ooldea, in South Australia, there stands a simple stone memorial; on one side is an engraving of a stiff-looking woman in Edwardian clothes and, on the other, the near-naked Aborigine King Billy. It is a memorial to a remarkable woman, Daisy Bates, who spent almost half her life seeking out and helping the Australian Aborigines, first through curiosity and then through love.

She was born Daisy May O'Dwyer in Ireland in 1859, one of four children who were, by Daisy's own admission, "a dreadfully happy-go-lucky, careless, misruley lot." While a strikingly beautiful young woman she fell sick and her doctors, knowing that her mother had died of consumption, recommended removal to a warm climate. In 1884 she left for Australia and found to her delight that it was "just like home." Perhaps the middle-class pioneers who welcomed her to their homesteads and the parties they threw for the more elegant of the newly arrived helped her overlook the roistering frontier atmosphere of Queensland in the late 19th Century.

Perhaps, though, Australia represented home in a rather different sense, for it was in Queensland that Daisy began to develop an interest, deeper and more satisfying than that afforded by her gay social life. She discovered the white pioneers and she became obsessed with and inspired by the courage they had displayed in carving their future in an alien land. It was this admiration that prompted her to marry one of them, Jack Bates, a tough, handsome drover in whom Daisy saw all that was most exciting in her enthusiastically adopted country.

It was a disastrous marriage – so disastrous, in fact, that when the couple later drifted apart Daisy preferred to tell people that her husband had died. Daisy might have fancied herself as a wife and co-partner of a romantic pioneer, but life with Jack Bates fell far short of her ideal. While she remained immaculate in her appearance, snobbish in her outlook and intellectual in her pretensions, her drover husband found refuge in life in the saddle and beers with his "cobbers" in the outback bars.

But he gave her a son and he gave her something that – sadly for the boy – was to provide her with even more satisfaction throughout her long life: a love and understanding of the Australian bush. Thanks to Jack Bates, Daisy learned how to pick a camp site, pitch a tent, light a fire and "bake damper" (a mixture of flour and water cooked on the campfire embers) and it was knowledge that was later to mean for her the difference between life and death.

Daisy acknowledged the effective end of her marriage almost exactly nine years after it was contracted. She returned to England, alone. For five years she stayed away from Australia, her husband and her young son, eventually getting a job with the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, W.T. Stead. There she learnt from scratch a profession that not only gave her a measure of independence, but also sufficient self-assurance to present herself to *The Times*, offering to investigate the alleged ill-treatment of the Aborigines by the white settlers.

At the time her sympathies were still strongly with the settlers though she had no love, it seemed, to spare for her family. When she returned to Australia to see them for the first time in five years, she found her husband "loose and flabby and common" and her son "dirty, unmothered, neglected."

The Aborigines soon supplanted both them and the settlers as her major interest. She was already becoming aware of what she called "an innate racial affinity" between herself and the Australian black man. Before long they were to become her life's consuming interest.

Her devotion to the Australian Aborigine was to take her deep into the bush where, overcome at the sheer wonder of it all and oblivious to physical discomfort, she acquired a unique insight into Aborigine life. Her love won her the confidence of Aborigine women who claimed to have eaten their own new-born babies and given baby meat to their other children in order to make them strong. It spurred her on to learn many Aborigine languages so that she could communicate with "her people." It gave her access to macabre initiation ceremonies that no white woman had ever witnessed before. It brought her into the most intimate contact with sick natives who turned to her when they were suffering from venereal diseases contracted from the white man. The woman to whom marital sex had come as a shocking revelation, unflinchingly massaged their sores with olive oil.

The Aborigines accepted without question this extraordinary white woman in her "uniform of the Empire" – veiled hat, size 3 button-boots, gloves and "a leather-bound skirt that was over three yards wide at the hem." To them she was *Kabbarli*, the grandmother, and in gratitude for all that she had done for them, and in recognition of what they believed to be her magical powers, one tribe made her Keeper of the Totems, the highest honour they could bestow.

But if the black man loved her, the white man was less enthusiastic. Serious anthropologists questioned the validity of her work, which they regarded as amateurish. When she applied for the post of Protector of the Aborigines in the Northern Territory, she was turned down – despite considerable backing from many quarters – because it was considered the risks involved would be too great for a woman. Her struggle to attain official recognition and payment were to dog her throughout the rest of her life and every defeat drove her deeper into the bush and closer to her Aboriginal family.

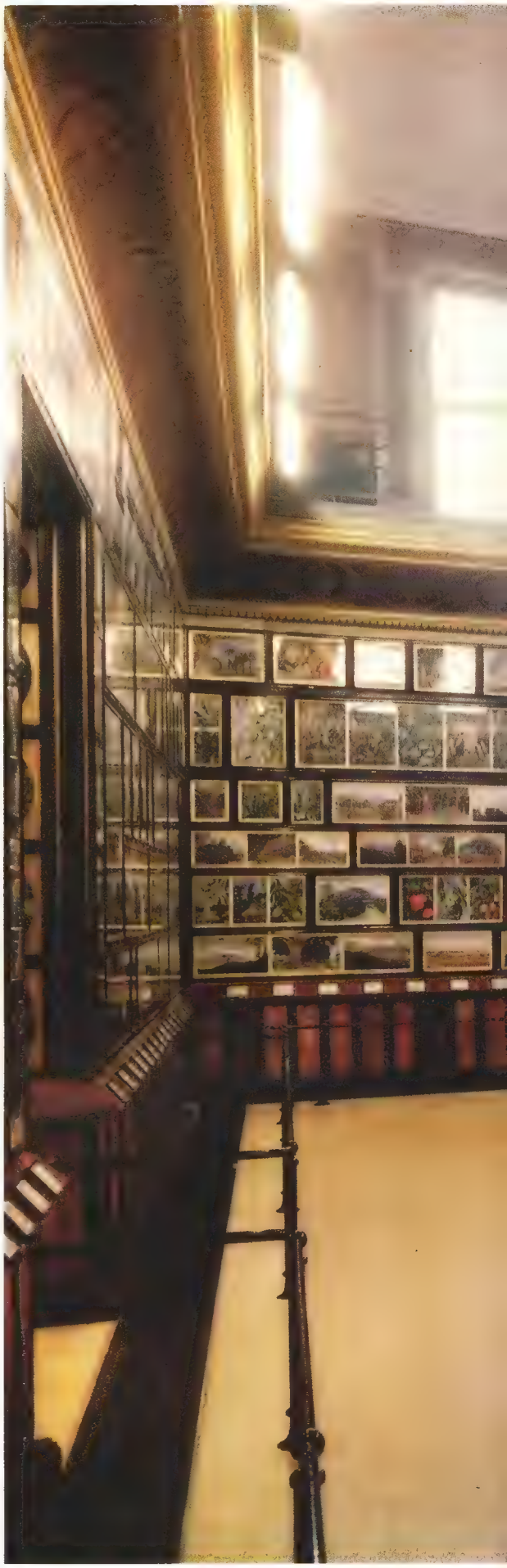
Eventually, however, she was to be rewarded. In the 1934 honours list she was awarded the C.B.E. ("the only woman in the world who can claim the distinction of the C.B.E. and blood brotherhood with an Aboriginal tribe," it was noted at the time). Further acclaim was to follow when *The Passing of the Aborigines*, the book on which she had worked for so long, was launched in 1938, and she found herself lauded as "The Greatest Woman in Empire."

Her life did not end on so high a note. In 1941 she went back to "her natives," only to find the Aborigines increasingly demoralized, their tribal laws breaking down. Worse was to come: once, suffering from malnutrition, she had to endure the humiliation of being whisked away from her camp by ambulance and subsequently admitted to hospital. She contrived to escape and went on one final pilgrimage to the bush; but she died, far from her Aborigines, in a suburban rest home.

The final irony was still in store. In place of the site she had chosen for her grave, the sandhills of her beloved outback, she was buried in Adelaide's North Road Cemetery in 1951.

# MARIANNE NORTH

Marianne North was one of that breed of Victorian spinsters who travelled alone, quietly and with great determination, indulging her consuming passion: painting flowers. For 15 years she painted her way across the world, recording exotic flora. These paintings are exhibited today in a gallery (right) that she had built at her own expense in the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in London.



The Marianne North Gallery at Kew Gardens contains 848 vivid examples of the artist-traveller's works, painted in oil on cardboard. These include five new species, discovered by her.

# "Aunt Pop," the Gentle Traveller

Born in Hastings in 1830, Marianne North enjoyed a carefree childhood and cultured upbringing as the adored daughter of a distinguished M.P., Frederick North. She never married, content to remain the affectionate "Aunt Pop" to her brother's and sister's families. Between the years 1871 and 1886 she visited every continent, making new friends and painting wherever she went.

She covered America, both north and south, and in 1872 found herself the chief guest at a dinner given by President Grant whose wife, as Marianne noted with amusement in her diary, "talked of me as the daughter of Lord North, the ex-Prime Minister of England who died in 1792. I knew I was old, but not that ancient!" She visited many parts of Asia, staying with the "White Rajah," Charles Brooke, in Sarawak where she concluded tartly that "those long European dinners are a mistake so near the Equator." At Charles Darwin's suggestion she visited Australia and New Zealand, and in many short hops to Europe and a voyage to Africa, she completed her collection of paintings of the world's flora. Marianne died in 1890, leaving behind a set of memoirs which she aptly named *Recollections of a Happy Life*.

**Marianne North sits serenely at her easel, working at one of her many paintings.**

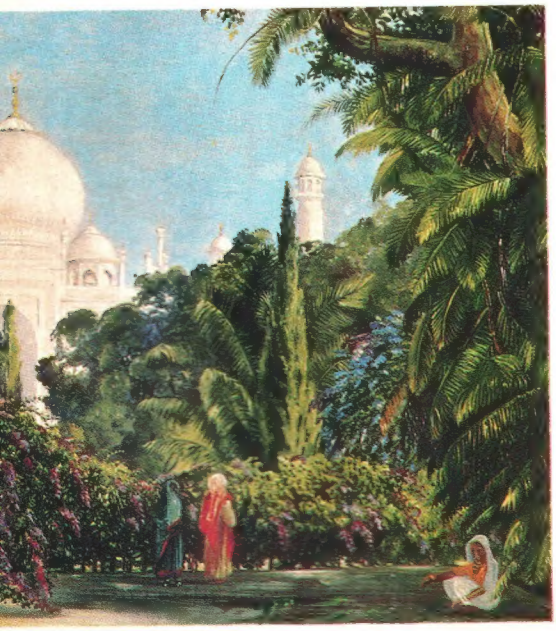
**View from the artist's window in Buitenzorg, Java.**

**Mount Earnshaw, in New Zealand.**

**The Taj Mahal, Agra, dominated by Indian flora**

A domestic scene on Praslin Island in the Seychelles.

"A medley of flowers" from Table Mountain, Cape of Good Hope.



A Singapore monkey beside the succulent fruit and flowers of the mangostoon tree.

# III. Beating at the Gates of Power

Mary Kingsley, who died in 1900, about the time that Emily Hobhouse was at her most active, was one of the most individualistic women in imperial history. Although she was only 39 when she died, she made a distinguished contribution to learning and contemporary political attitudes towards West Africa.

Her fascination with the continent took her deep into parts of West Africa where no white men had penetrated, let alone a white woman dressed in the kind of "elderly housekeeper's attire" she favoured. Her early years had been spent in sheltered domesticity, yet her sangfroid was amazing. She moved among the cannibals with admirable equanimity and even the weird discovery in her tent one night of a bag filled with "a human hand, three big toes, four eyes, two ears and other portions of the human frame" appears not to have disturbed her.

Her studies also took her deep into the African mind: her association with Africa became a love-affair, and it gave her an understanding of the country. She developed a notorious hostility towards the missionaries, who she considered had too little regard for African culture.

She was, she declared, an imperialist – but her imperialism was of a very different kind from what she felt to be the "bragging imperialism" that characterized *The Times* and many of the other newspapers, books and periodicals at the turn of the century. Britain was not in the colonies as a sacred duty, she said. Britain's role should be to encourage trade, for it was trade that would benefit the Africans, the merchants and the mother country. And in order that trade should flourish, she wanted to see indirect rule with the traders represented on West African councils since they rather than colonial officials were the best people suited by experience for the job. But at that time the idea was too ambitious to win much support from anybody.

Although during her lifetime she got short shrift from the Colonial Office, her *Travels in West Africa* and *West African Studies* were later to become essential reading for all West African administrators, and if it is impossible directly to trace her influence on the development of colonial policy in the early 20th Century, yet that policy was to be in close harmony with her ideas.

Rudyard Kipling described Mary Kingsley as the bravest woman he had ever known and the Liverpool merchants who traded to West Africa were said to "adore her memory." Lord Lugard, who was to be the first Governor-General of Nigeria, was altogether more cool: "I do not worship at the shrine myself," he wrote in 1904, "and I think her undoubted cleverness did a good deal of harm." This was in a letter to his wife, Flora Shaw, who – as he went on to say – was a "very different person from Mary Kingsley."

She was indeed. Flora Shaw was appointed colonial editor of *The Times* in 1893, a remarkable "first" for a woman. She combined her talent for writing with her growing interest in the colonies. It was an interest she took with total seriousness for, although she wrote quickly, every word was backed by hours, days, even weeks of solid research. What she read, what she saw, and what she remembered of the poverty she had seen in London's East End while a young woman combined to make her an imperialist, not because she believed in the domination of one people by another, but because she saw in the colonies "homes, more homes" for the hard-working poor.

That she should have been so successful in her career and that she should have influenced both the Colonial Office and the general public to the extent she did was all the more remarkable for the fact that she was constantly having to revert to the more traditional role of the Victorian daughter, providing a home for her sisters, educating their children and nursing elderly aunts and uncles. Nor is there any evidence that being a woman won her any compensatory concessions in her chosen career.

She was acknowledged always to carry her sex with discretion – and on only one occasion did it possibly mar her judgment. Like other women, including the "unwomanly" Mary Kingsley, Flora Shaw came under the spell of the charismatic Cecil Rhodes, largely because she was fired by his fervour for the Empire. It was her personal involvement with Rhodes that led her, in 1895, to become implicated in the ill-fated Jameson Raid part of Rhodes's abortive plot to take over the Transvaal.

Although subsequently vindicated at a public inquiry into the role that *The Times* had played in the affair, her relations with that newspaper were never quite the same again and, after coming close to a nervous breakdown, she retired in 1900. It must have been with some relief that at the age of 49 she agreed to marry Sir Frederick Lugard, with whom she then went to West Africa.

Although her interest in the colonies was if anything now heightened by marriage to so distinguished a colonial administrator, her involvement in her husband's professional life was less than she had doubtless hoped, since poor health prevented her staying with him in both Nigeria and Hong Kong. Although she continued to write, the marriage effectively ended her distinguished career and, like the wives of many other eminent men, she devoted more of her time to social work, this becoming part of the establishment whose foundations she had once wanted to shake.

The last woman to reach the top echelons of imperial policy-making was Dame Margery Perham. Still a leading expert on African affairs, she is a unique blend of Oxford academic defending the interests of non-Europeans, and indomitable traveller throughout Africa and many other parts of the world. It is said that she has been respectfully offered marriage by more than one African chief.

As a colleague of Lord Lugard, she publicized his ideas on "indirect rule" as the most just method of ruling the less sophisticated peoples of the Empire. As Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in Oxford and teacher of young members of the Colonial Service, she influenced a generation of colonial administrators. As an indefatigable writer of letters to *The Times*, she was the scourge of statesmen who seemed ready to sell out the interests of Africans to European settlers in Kenya, Rhodesia and elsewhere. Possibly no single person, man or woman, exercised a greater influence on the 20th-Century history of the British Empire and Commonwealth than she

*Corporal, Grenadier Guards, 1845*